UMMUL MOMINEEN

ZAINAB

BINT JAHSH

زَيْنَبُ بِنت جَحْشِ رضئ الله تعالى عنها

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UMMUL MOMINEEN ZAINAB BINT JAHSH

(رضئ الله تعالى عنہا)

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بِسم الله الرحمنِ الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام
على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين

UMMUL MOMINEEN ZAINAB BINT JAHSH (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا)

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Among the noble households of Makkah, few were as intimately connected to Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) as that of Zainab bint Jaḥsh ibn Riab al-Asadiyyah (رضي الله تعالى عنها). Born into the Banu Asad tribe, she was of noble lineage and distinguished character. Her mother, Umaymah bint Abd al-Muṭṭalib, was the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) paternal aunt, making Zainab his first cousin—a familial bond that would take on great theological and spiritual significance later in her life.

Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was born in Makkah in the generation just before the advent of Islam, likely around the year 590 CE. Raised in a respected Quraishi household, she was known from a young age for her beauty, refinement, and integrity. Her upbringing, surrounded by the social and literary culture of Quraishi aristocracy, nurtured in her a sense of modesty, self-respect, and devotion, even before Islam's moral code was revealed in full.

Even in the days of Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance), Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was known to guard her chastity, avoid idle speech, and conduct herself with dignity and restraint. Her household, like others in the Quraishi elite, was accustomed to privilege, but Zainab herself possessed a seriousness of character and spiritual yearning that set her apart from many of her peers.

With the arrival of the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) message and the gradual conversion of her family members—including her brothers, Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) soon accepted Islam wholeheartedly. Her early acceptance of the message marked the beginning of a new phase in her life—one in which her faith, not just her lineage, would define her honor and status.

Though born into the comfort of nobility, Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was prepared to face the trials that came with belief. As one of the early Muslim women, she witnessed the pressures faced by converts in Makkah and understood the cost of aligning oneself with the message of Tawḥid (monotheism). Her unwavering commitment to Allah and His Apostle (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) would soon place her at the heart of one of Islam's most transformative social reforms: the dismantling of lineage-based pride and the redefinition of marital equality.

Thus, her early life was a rare blend of prestige and piety, family closeness to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), and an innate sense of selfless devotion that would soon distinguish her among the Mothers of the Believers.

LIFE BEFORE MARRIAGE TO THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم)

Before her eventual marriage to the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), Zainab bint Jaḥsh (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) lived a life shaped by nobility, piety, and a trial that would become the foundation for a divine lesson etched in revelation. As a woman of high Quraishi lineage—his cousin through his aunt Umaymah—the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) always held Zainab in esteem, and her faith and integrity made her one of the most devout women of her time.

Yet in one of the most pivotal moments in her life, Allah and His Apostle (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) chose her to become part of a social transformation that would challenge the deeply rooted norms of Arab society: the belief that bloodline and tribal status defined a person's worth, especially in marriage.

At the heart of this reform was Zaid ibn Ḥarithah (رضئ الله تعالى عنه)—formerly a slave, later freed and adopted by the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), and often referred to as "Zaid ibn Muhammad" before such naming was forbidden. Zaid had been raised in the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) home and was beloved to him. In order to demonstrate that freedom, piety, and character should be the true criteria for marital suitability, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) proposed Zaid's marriage to Zainab.

Zainab (رضي الله تعالى عنها), despite her devotion and obedience, initially hesitated. This was not due to arrogance, but due to the cultural weight of lineage—a concept deeply embedded in pre-Islamic Arab society. Her family, too, was unsure. After all, she was from the Quraishi elite; Zaid, though honored by the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), had once been enslaved. But then came the divine command: وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ [When Allah and His Apostle (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) have decided a matter, it is not for a believing man or a believing woman, to have a choice about it]. (Al-Ahzab - 36)

Upon receiving this command, Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنها) submitted wholeheartedly to the will of Allah, and the marriage was contracted. It was a bold, unprecedented act of faith—a woman of noble blood marrying a former slave, not for love or worldly gain, but in obedience to her Lord.

However, the marriage proved to be difficult and short-lived. Despite the best intentions and the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) guidance, Zaid and Zainab were not compatible in temperament. Zaid (رضئ الله تعالى عنه), out of humility and perhaps discomfort with the social disparity, sought the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) counsel multiple times about divorcing her. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) consistently advised patience, hoping to preserve the marriage and avoid what would later become a major doctrinal shift.

Eventually, Zaid (رضئ الله تعالى عنه) divorced Zainab (رضي الله عنها), and thus began a new chapter—one that would elevate her status beyond what she or anyone else could have foreseen.

Her trial of obedience and public scrutiny had been heavy. Yet Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنها) endured with dignity and devotion, never expressing bitterness or resentment. She was unaware that Allah Himself had chosen her for a marriage that would be decreed from above the heavens, to the Final Apostle (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم).

What began as a union meant to confront tribalism would soon turn into one of the most spiritually significant marriages in Islamic history.

MARRIAGE TO THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم)

The marriage of Zainab bint Jaḥsh (رضئ الله تعالى عنها) to the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) stands as one of the most unique and theologically significant unions in Islamic history. Unlike any of his other marriages, this one was not arranged by family, nor initiated by personal proposal—it was divinely decreed and revealed in the Quran itself.

Following her divorce from Zaid ibn Ḥarithah (رضئ الله تعالى عنه)—the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) adopted son—a divine message was revealed that would reshape social norms and reinforce the distinction between legal adoption and blood kinship. In pre-Islamic Arab culture, an adopted son was treated exactly like a biological one, including the prohibition of marrying the former wife of that adopted son. Islam corrected this notion, emphasizing that legal kinship must follow the biological line, and that adoption—while still meritorious—did not confer blood-based restrictions.

The Quran explicitly addressed the matter: وَإِذْ تَقُولُ لِلَّذِي أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَأَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْسِكْ عَلَيْكَ زَوْجَكَ وَاتَّقِ اللَّهَ فَلَمَّا قَضَىٰ زَيْدٌ مِنْهَا وَطَرًا زَوَّجْنَاكَهَا لِكَيْ لَا يَكُونَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ حَرَجٌ فِي أَزْوَاجِ أَدْعِيَائِهِمْ إِذَا قَضَوْا مِنْهُنَّ وَطَرًا ۚ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ مَفْعُولًا ۚ وَتُخْفِي فِي نَفْسِكَ مَا اللَّهُ مُبْدِيهِ وَتَخْشَى النَّاسَ وَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَاهُ ۖ [And (remember, O Prophet ﷺ) when you said to the one for whom Allah has done a favor and you (too) have done a favor, 'Keep your wife and fear Allah,' while concealing within yourself what Allah was going to reveal. And (so) you were considering the people, whereas Allah was more worthy of your consideration. So, when

Zaid (رضئ الله تعالى عنہ) totally lost interest in (keeping) his wife, We gave her to you in marriage, so that there would be no blame on the believers for marrying the ex-wives of their adopted sons after their divorce. And Allah's command is totally binding] (Al-Ahzab – 37)

With this verse, Allah Himself officiated the marriage, and Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) became the only woman in Islamic history to be married without a wali or formal ceremony—her nikaḥ was performed "from above the heavens." For this reason, she would later be referred to—often by herself and sometimes humorously in the presence of the other wives—as "the one whose marriage was arranged by Allah."

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) held a walimah (marriage feast) in her honor, which was among the most lavish of his household celebrations. He offered food to guests and recited blessings, and it was during this event that the etiquette of private audience with the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) wives was clarified in revelation. The verse of ḥijab (the veil or curtain) in Surah al-Aḥzab, verse 53 was revealed in connection to her wedding, instituting the practice of physical separation between unrelated men and the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) wives. Her marriage thus became the setting for multiple rulings that would shape the social fabric of the Muslim community.

Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) entered the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) household with a deep sense of humility and thankfulness, despite the immense honor bestowed upon her. Yet, as a woman of strong character and noble lineage, she was also keenly aware of her unique status. At times, this led to tensions with some of the other wives, particularly Ummul Momineen Aishah (رضي الله تعالى عنها), whose closeness to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) was unmatched in affection. Yet even in competition, there was mutual recognition of virtue. Ummul Momineen Aishah (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) herself would later say of Zainab: *"I have not seen a woman more pious, more conscious of Allah, more truthful in speech, more generous in charity, and more devoted in trying to draw near to Allah."* (Sunan an-Nasa'i)

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) honored her, recognized her intelligence, and appreciated her righteousness. She was among the few of his wives who had both noble descent and noble conduct, and her reputation in the community was that of a woman of truthfulness and devotion.

Her marriage to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) was not only a personal union—it was a Quranic decree, a social correction, and a spiritual distinction. And Zainab (رضي الله تعالى عنها), for her part, bore the honor with dignity, sincerity, and a quiet sense of triumph that Allah Himself had chosen her as a wife of His Final Apostle (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم).

LIFE AS WIFE OF THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم)

The household of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) was not only a place of intimacy and love, but a cradle of divine guidance and moral education. Among its most dignified members was Zainab bint Jaḥsh (رضي الله تعالى عنها)—a woman who entered this sacred circle by divine command and lived within it with remarkable piety, dignity, and truthfulness.

Zainab's (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) relationship with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) was defined by mutual respect and spiritual commitment. She was aware of the unique distinction she held—being the only woman whose marriage to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) had been decreed directly by Allah in the Quran. Yet this did not turn her toward arrogance. On the contrary, it imbued her with a sense of accountability, which she carried with steadfast worship, charity, and devotion to Allah.

She was a woman of serious character, rarely light-hearted, and deeply committed to righteousness. Known among the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) wives for her truthful tongue, devotion to prayer and fasting, and unmatched generosity, she often gave away in charity everything that came into her hands. When the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) praised her in the presence of his wives, he once remarked: *"The most generous among you is Zainab."* (Sahih Muslim)

Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) took pride not in wealth or status, but in proximity to Allah. She was known to fast regularly and pray long into the night. Her home was simple, her lifestyle austere. She lived not as the cousin of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم), nor merely as the recipient of divine marriage, but as a humble servant of Allah committed to the path of truth.

Like any household shared by multiple individuals of strong character, the wives of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) occasionally experienced moments of tension. Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) and Aisha (رضي الله تعالى عنها), in particular, had a relationship marked by both competition and mutual recognition. At times, Zainab asserted her noble lineage and the uniqueness of her divine marriage. Yet even Ummul Momineen Aisha (رضي الله تعالى عنها) would later admit: *"I have never seen a woman more devoted to Allah, more truthful in speech, keener in maintaining ties of kinship, or more generous in charity than Zainab."* (Sunan an-Nasa'i)

She was outspoken when truth was at stake. In an incident recorded in the *ḥadith of Ifk*—the slander against Ummul Momineen Aisha (رضي الله تعالى عنها)—the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) consulted his wives. When he asked Zainab, she demonstrated noble restraint and said: *"O Apostle of Allah, I protect my hearing and my sight. By Allah, I know nothing of her except good."* This testimony, despite their rivalry, proved Zainab's integrity and taqwa.

In the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) final illness, Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) was among the wives who attended to him with concern and love. Her relationship with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) was never defined by indulgence or sentimentality alone—it was built on mutual spiritual elevation. She was not only a wife, but a witness to revelation, a transmitter of hadith, and a model of female excellence in the Islamic tradition.

She bore no children, but her legacy is rich. Through her service, character, and worship, she earned a reputation as one of the most Allah-conscious women in the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) life.

LIFE AFTER THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم)

The passing of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) in 11 AH was a moment of deep sorrow for the entire Muslim community, but for the Mothers of the Believers, it marked the end of the most intimate and spiritually profound chapter of their lives. Among them, Zainab bint Jaḥsh (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) bore her grief with the same composure, devotion, and sincerity that had defined her character during her years with the Apostle of Allah (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم).

With his death, Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) withdrew further from the world, dedicating herself to worship and quiet remembrance. Her home in Madinah became a sanctuary of prayer, reflection, and charity. Although she no longer held the same central role in the political and communal life of the Ummah, she continued to be a symbol of piety and moral clarity, respected by the Companions and the next generation of Muslims alike.

She remained deeply engaged in acts of charity, continuing to give away whatever wealth she received—whether from family, gifts, or her allotted share from the Bayt al-Mal (public treasury). It was said that she never held onto wealth overnight if she knew someone in need. Her asceticism reflected her gratitude for the immense spiritual honor Allah had granted her.

Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) continued to be known as the most generous among the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) wives, and this virtue remained with her until the very end. During the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab (رضئ الله تعالى عنه), when he sent stipends to the Mothers of the Believers, Zainab's share was brought to her. She wept upon receiving it and said: *"O Allah, let this not be a cause of fitnah for me."* She then distributed all of it to charity.

Despite her noble lineage and the distinction of having her marriage sanctified by divine revelation, Zainab (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) carried no pride or arrogance. She saw her nearness to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) not as a platform for worldly power, but as a trust—a position to be honored through worship, not fame.

In the 20th year after Hijrah (641 CE), Zainab bint Jaḥsh (رضئ الله تعالى عنہا) passed away in Madinah. Hers was the first death among the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) wives after his own. The Caliph Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab (رضئ الله تعالى عنه) personally led her janazah (funeral prayer) and she was laid to rest in Jannat al-Baqi, alongside the other Mothers of the Believers and noble Companions.

Her death was mourned by all who remembered her truthfulness, her deep spirituality, and her sacrificial devotion to both her Lord and His Apostle (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم).